

VZCZCXRO7734  
RR RUEHROV  
DE RUEHKH #0395/01 0460939  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
R 150939Z FEB 06  
FM AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 1481  
INFO RUCNIAD/IGAD COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 KHARTOUM 000395

SIPDIS

NSC WASHDC

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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PHUM](#) [SOCI](#) [PREF](#) [PGOV](#) [EAID](#) [SU](#)

SUBJECT: Southern Sudan: The Dinka Bor Come Home

¶1. Summary: Regional Refugee Coordinator Sam Healy and CG Juba accompanied a UNHCR delegation to Bor, Jonglei State, on February 13 for a first-hand look at the return of the second group vulnerable Dinka Bor transported from Juba to Bor on a Nile barge. Conversations with local officials and UN staff revealed several difficulties with the program, including reluctance by some returnees to continue from past way stations due to lack of transport for their goods and for want of agricultural inputs. UNHCR has taken immediate steps to alleviate this problem, including securing funding to provide trucks to continue the transport of returnees home. End Summary.

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Background  
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¶2. A UNHCR team led by David Kapya, the Geneva-based Deputy Director for Sudan and Chad Special Operations, invited RefCoord and CG Juba to fly to Bor to witness the final stages of the return of Dinka Bor herders from Western Equatoria to their home in Jonglei State. This population was displaced progressively from the beginning of the war in 1983. SAF and GOS-supported militia attacks on the Bor area, from which John Garang originated, terminated with the infamous Bor massacre of 1991, in which 2,000 Dinka civilians died. Much of Bor was torched during the raids. Thousands of Dinka Bor subsequently fled the region, settling in Bahr El Ghazal and Equatoria or moving north to Khartoum.

¶3. Frictions between the displaced Dinka Bor and local tribes, especially the Zande agriculturists of Western Equatoria, have long been a flashpoint. To alleviate this conflict, arrangements for the return of Dinka Bor in Western Equatoria were in the works for three years. Following signature of the CPA, the plan was set in motion in 2005. Thirty-four Bor cattle camps totaling between 15,000-17,000 persons moved east/northeast toward Bor under SLPA military escort, to avoid cattle raiding and clashes with other groups along the route. The cattle camps crossed the Nile at the Juba Bridge starting in late 2005 and proceeded North to Bor. However, some 4,000 vulnerable persons - the elderly, the young, the infirm - were deemed too weak to continue the trek and were taken under UN care in Juba until the International Organization for Migration (IOM) could arrange for river transportation to Bor, where the vulnerable population could rejoin families in their villages of origin.

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Situation on the Ground: Water, Sanitation, Education  
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¶4. The arrival of returnees has had a palpable effect on the area. South of the Bor airstrip, entire villages are springing up as returnees seek to settle in before the

rains began. The visiting delegation met first with members of the Sudan Reconstruction and Relief Committee (SRRC) led by Deputy Director Panchol Jung Kuo. He said that the Dinka Bor are returning to a difficult situation, with shortages of clean water, poor sanitation, and no education available in many outlying areas. Jonglei state has a population of about one million from six different tribes; projected returnees throughout the state number an estimated 700,000. The economy is exclusively agricultural, so it is imperative to settle newcomers into the payams (rural townships) and on the land before the agricultural season commences.

¶5. The SRRC members presented various statistics. There are only 48 primary schools and a single secondary school in South Bor. Bor town has nine primary sections and one co-located Arabic and English secondary school. In rural areas, instruction is in English; in town, in Arabic.

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The High Cost of Demining Roads  
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¶6. Kuo said that the main road north along the Nile had been cleared of mines as far north as Duk Padiet, and southward to Juba. The road from Lokichoggio through Kapoeta is also clear, creating a wishbone shaped corridor south. GTZ-funded demining operations are working to link the town with the counties, but many of these roads remained impassable. He said that both sides had mined the roads at various times, but claimed that only the SPLA had been willing to provide information on the quantity and types of mines it had planted. He continued that some roads are now overgrown, and

KHARTOUM 00000395 002 OF 002

resources dedicated to demining are insufficient to cover clearance of saplings and vegetation as well. An accompanying UN security official interjected that the cost of finding and clearing a single mine on a normal is about one thousand dollars. Often, it is more economical to open a new road rather than clear an overgrown and heavily mined road.

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Barges Create IDP Bottlenecks, Many Resist Onward Travel  
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¶7. The SRRC members expressed concerns that the way station along the Nile where the first barge of returnees disembarked has become a bottleneck. A number of the returnees has settled in, creating a de facto IDP camp along the riverbank. Anne Encontre, the UNHCR representative in Juba, agreed that this is an unanticipated problem. UN expectations had been that the returnees would spontaneously move back to their places of origin. Many had not, complaining that they were unable to transport their possessions back to their villages. A second UNHCR official said that the UN hoped to lease trucks to expedite the return. An SRRC official stressed that non-food items are also desperately needed, especially agricultural implements. Encontre cautioned that while UNHCR had been first on the ground, other UN agencies such as FAO would be responsible for such distributions at the village level.

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Second Barge Arrives  
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¶8. The visiting delegation arrived at the riverside way station just as the second barge arrived, carrying four hundred passengers and an Australian television crew. The atmosphere was festive and emotional as elderly passengers disembarked to see their homeland for the first time in two decades, and children for the very

first time ever. A visit to the nearby way station revealed that it had indeed become a choke point, with the first arrivals occupying temporary structures needed to house the newcomers. The makeshift IDP camp had neither the sanitary facilities nor sufficient infrastructure to house any significant number of people for any length of time.

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Don't Bring Your Guns to Town  
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¶9. Although there was a visible SPLA military presence in Bor town, virtually none of the soldiers was armed. This phenomenon, relatively rare to South Sudan, resulted from an incident in early January where an argument between a northerner and a southerner ended in the shooting of the latter, and generalized gunfire throughout Bor as SPLA troops shot it out with any armed northerners unlucky enough to be in town. Five deaths occurred and the UN temporarily pulled out, leading the local SPLA commander to forbid anyone from carrying a firearm in town.

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A Felicitous and Rapid Response  
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¶10. Over dinner back in Juba, Kapya said that his call to Geneva had resulted in the rapid release of USD 100,000 from the emergency fund, and that he anticipated that trucks could begin transporting returnees and their goods back to their villages before the weekend. Kapya calculated that, due to ongoing spontaneous returns from those still in Juba, that six more barges - one per week - should complete the return of the vulnerable Dinka Bor by the end of March, and produce a happy ending to this one small chapter in the social and physical reconstruction of Southern Sudan.

STEINFELD